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ABSTRACT

Since 1980, the percentage of ethnic minority students at Golden West College (GWC) has nearly doubled. To meet the English language needs of this rapidly growing student population, a speaking and listening course was introduced into the curriculum in 1982, followed by a pronunciation course in 1985. Both courses were part of the Speech/English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program. In an effort to overcome the limitations of group recitation exercises in the pronunciation course, community volunteers were recruited as tutors during the first year of the course. Pairs of students met with a volunteer once a week for a 30-minute conversation providing individualized feedback. Following continued growth and success of the volunteer program, in October 1989, a campuswide Intercultural Center (IC) was established to house the program. During the first year, the IC planning task force drafted a mission statement and objectives which were distributed to college personnel and students for feedback and modification; conducted a survey of students which determined that 89% of the ESL students described their first contact with GWC in positive terms; and held a week-long intercultural festival. By spring 1991, the Community Volunteer Program included 96 volunteers providing 1,993 hours of service per semester. The IC and the volunteers assist students in the following areas: (1) study skills; (2) note-taking skills; (3) academic skills; (4) English language and American culture skills; (5) self-esteem building; and (6) referral to social agencies. Flexible scheduling at the IC and an emphasis on self-esteem building are among the principal reasons for the program's success. (PAA)

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A Community Volunteer Program for Supporting Second Language Students Who May Be Academically At-Risk

By

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Golden West College is a community college located in Orange County, California where 30% of the population are members of ethnic minorities. In the Fall, 1990, the student population of the college was slightly over 14,000, of which 65% identified themselves as white, 30% as members of ethnic minorities and 5% declined to indicate any ethnic affiliation. Since 1980, the college's non-white student population, as a percentage of total student enrollment, has nearly doubled. Over half of the ethnic population includes students from Asian countries, especially Vietnam.

The term "at-risk" or "high risk" is a theoretical concept based on an implicit assessment of the degree of negative risk associated with the educational experience. "High-risk students" are minorities, the academically disadvantaged, the disabled, and those of low socioeconomic status. (Jones and Watson) Certainly, not all students from ethnic minorities can be classified as "at-risk." However, for those students whose second language is English and who have had prior education in another culture, the likelihood of their being at-risk in the American education system is high if they do not have a support system through which they can learn to use English effectively and adapt to the teaching/learning styles prevalent in the American educational system.

This paper describes the evolution of the community volunteer program at Golden West College which is a support system for ESL student that had its beginning in the Speech Communication Department and has evolved into a campuswide Intercultural Center in approximately five years.

The Evolution of a Speech/ESL Program

To meet the needs of a rapidly growing ethnic population within our student body, the Speech Communication Department initiated two Speech/ESL courses into the curriculum.

Speaking and Listening Skills (SpCom 025)

SpCom 025 is an elective hybrid speech course for ESL students that was introduced in the Spring Semester, 1982. This course includes nine components of study and a total of 16 competency-based skill demonstrations (8 in speaking and 8 in listening) in the following areas:

1. Stating and responding to personal communication goals.

2. Initiating and managing a conversation.
3. Stating and responding to opinion statements.
4. Explaining and responding to a description of a process.
5. Describing and responding to a factual story.
6. Initiating and responding in a problem-solving discussion.
7. Initiating and responding in a job interview.
8. Expressing and responding to feeling statements.

The assessments are conducted by trained peer assessors in the Speech Communication Center. Each ESL student is required to achieve a mastery rating on the ability to demonstrate both the speaking and listening functions within these eight skill areas. They may go to the center as often as necessary in order to achieve a mastery rating. Their achievement in these skills is an integral part of the grading system for the course. In order to earn a grade of "C" or higher, a student must achieve mastery on all 16 assessments.

Pronunciation Skills (SpCom 020)

In the Fall Semester of 1985, a second course for ESL student was introduced focusing on pronunciation skills. Unlike the hybrid course, where frequent opportunities for skill demonstrations were easily observed by the instructor, the course in pronunciation skills presented a dilemma. In the pronunciation course, the greatest amount of practice could most readily be provided through recitation in unison. However, the instructor was unable to determine whether pronunciation was practiced accurately when 30 students were reciting at the same time. Furthermore, recitation did not provide a meaningful communicative context for learning pronunciation.

Biweekly assignments requiring students to complete activities on audiotape so that the instructor could listen and give individualized feedback helped to create a support system through the process of "oral journaling." However, this procedure did not provide frequent face-to-face opportunities for practicing pronunciation skills with an English-speaking person in spontaneous conversation.

Midway through the first semester in which the pronunciation course was first taught,

an attempt was made to attract volunteers from the community who would be willing to meet weekly with students to practice accurate pronunciation in conversations. It was assumed that the volunteers could also interact with the students about practical day-to-day information needed to live in the American culture. These conversations were intended to provide a genuine communicative context for learning outside the regular classroom.

The idea was almost an immediate success due to the assistance of the Golden West College Patrons, an organization of primarily retired persons who serve the campus by earning funds for student scholarships through their volunteer efforts. A grant of $1,000 was obtained from the College Educational Development Assistance Fund and provided to the Patrons in exchange for their services as volunteers to work in the Speech/ESL program within the Speech Communication Center for one year. The program began with seven volunteers serving one section of 30 ESL students in the pronunciation class. Half hour appointments were scheduled on a weekly basis. Two students signed to meet with one volunteer. The appointment was incorporated into the grading process for the course. (Ratliffe and Hudson)

The Patrons are still serving our students over five years later with no additional remuneration. Because students pressured for more time with volunteers and because course enrollment increased, Ruth Hunter, an Emeritus Professor of Speech Communication who was paid to coordinate the Speech Communication Center for ten hours a week, began to donate an additional 20 to 30 hours per week for the purpose of seeking additional volunteers through creating recruitment brochures to send to community agencies and organizations, writing articles in the local press, and speaking to service groups. With this effort, the Community Volunteer Program became a new service within the Speech Communication Center.

Within a year, the number of volunteers grew to a level that enabled Sharon Ratliffe, the Speech/ESL instructor, to require a minimum of a thirty-minute appointment each week for all student enrolled in both the pronunciation (SpCom 020) and the speaking and listening skills (SpCom 025) courses. A manual structuring weekly appointments for the community volunteers was prepared for each class. Each manual included course-related assignments to serve as a catalyst conversation. SpCom 025 students also were able to practice their 16 skill

competencies with volunteers before meeting with a peer assessor for evaluation.

Speech Communication Center Relocates in Existing Writing Center

In the Summer of 1988, the Speech Communication Center was relocated to the facility that housed the already existing Writing Center, a laboratory for the English Department. By the Spring of 1989, it became apparent that the oral assessment of students in all speech courses plus the growing volunteer program involving oral conversations with Speech/ESL students was not conducive to the environment needed by students and faculty concentrating on writing skills.

Fortunately, a two-room area adjacent to the combined Writing and Speech Communication Center and separated from it only by a glass wall became available. The associate dean responsible for both programs was able to secure the vacated space for program expansion with a commitment to both the vice president of instruction and the president to improve services to all ESL students. Conversations among Ruth Hunter, Sharon Ratliffe, and Donna Willoughby, the Associate Dean, focused on the need to expand the activities of the community volunteer program, the need for encouraging intercultural interaction among all individuals in the college community, and the need for improved services for second language, second culture students.

Speech/ESL Community Volunteer Program

Expands into a Campuswide Intercultural Center

In October, 1989, the Speech/ESL Community Volunteer Program was moved into the area adjacent to the Writing and Speech Communication Center. Ruth Hunter, coordinator of the volunteer program, became acting coordinator of the Intercultural Center, working with a modest budget for supplies and two 19-hour student assistants, one bilingual in Spanish and the other in Vietnamese. It became clear that if the concept of a campuswide Intercultural Center was to become a significant part of the college, the energies of more individuals were needed to provide broad-based support and direction.

A task force was created that involved Ruth Hunter, Sharon Ratliffe, Donna Willoughby and additional members, including three new faculty (one each in speech, ESL, and English), a

Spanish instructor, a financial aids coordinator/counselor (Vietnamese), the President of the Associated Students, a representative from counseling, the President of the GWC Patrons, the Director of Public Relations, and representatives from the Foreign Language and Sociology Departments. The task force was balanced both in gender and ethnicity.

This group was in place for a year and achieved three major tasks:

1. They drafted a mission statement and objectives for the Intercultural center that was distributed to classified staff, administrators, and all full time faculty as well as to a sample of students from classes whose instructors volunteered to conduct the survey requesting feedback on the drafted statement. When approved, one of the four goals of the Intercultural Center was established as "To provide a supportive and enriched atmosphere for all students, and assistance to ethnic minorities so that they can become more at ease in the dominant culture."
2. They engaged the students and instructor of the Experimental Psychology class in conducting a survey to determine how satisfied students were with their experience at the college. The sample of 762 students included 435 randomly selected plus an additional 327 from English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. 63% were native speakers of English (NSE) while 37% were of ethnic minorities , including 22% Vietnamese, 6% Spanish, 6% other Asian, and 3% other language groups. With an 85% return, the majority of all students described their first contact with Golden West College in positive terms [76% (NSE); 89% (ESL)]. Both groups expressed a desire to have support groups or a support person available to them.
3. The group planned and executed the First Annual Festival of Friendship in March, 1989, a week-long campuswide inauguration of the Intercultural Center. The festival involved students, faculty, and staff in celebrating the various cultures represented on campus. Professional development activities were sponsored by the College Development Office throughout the week.

At the end of the year, the task force became a standing committee and was renamed the Intercultural Affairs Committee whose charge is to oversee the Intercultural Center and carry

out its mission.

The Community Volunteer Program Continues to Expand

In the Spring Semester, 1991, a little over five years after the inception of the Speech/ESL Community Volunteer Program, the staffing of the Intercultural Center includes 96 unpaid volunteers providing 1,993 hours of service during the 18-week semester, or the equivalent of over three full time staff members working 40-hour weeks. Their service continues to be required within the course outlines of the two original Speech/ESL courses. However, primarily through the efforts of their appointment schedule coordinator, Lien Nguyen, the volunteers also assist students enrolled in other courses at the college as well as members of the community who come to the campus solely to benefit from conversations with the volunteers. During the past semester, the services of the volunteers were used, for example, by three Vietnamese adults who were a dentist, a doctor, and a pharmacist in Vietnam. Their limited English prohibits them from participating in formal education or obtaining employment in the United States.

The most recent change in the structure and scope of the Intercultural Center occurred in January, 1991, when the position of International Education Coordinator was created to manage the campus study abroad program. This position was filled by a Professor of Spanish who receives 60% released time and is located in the Intercultural Center. Her presence has facilitated the expansion of the volunteer schedule in the evening and has generated increased interest among Hispanic students in using the Intercultural Center on a regular basis. She also has been able to recruit community volunteers primarily through the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), who conduct their monthly meeting in the Intercultural Center.

As word has spread on the campus and throughout the community about the volunteers' services, the program has expanded to meet a wider variety of needs than those presented by students enrolled in the Speech/ESL courses. Expansion has occurred in at least five areas:

1. Study Skills.

Listening Skills (SpCom 011) has existed as an open entry/open exit course since

1985. The course has been structured around an audiotape self-paced program to improve critical listening. (Sartain) Ruth Hunter adapted the self-paced program to involve a community volunteer working individually with an ESL student by reading aloud to the student from the exercise material of the audio-tutorial program. Before this adaptation was made, approximately 3 in 15 students (20%) would successfully complete the course while the rest dropped out. During the 1991 Spring Semester, 48 ESL students enrolled in SpCom 011, 28 (58%) completed the course successfully, while 15 remain enrolled. At this time, the retention rate is 83%.

2. Note-Taking Skills.

At the request of students, practice in taking notes from lectures using logical outlining procedures has been introduced as a volunteer service. Working from printed lecture materials, volunteers read aloud while students outline what they hear. Volunteers then work with the student to compare their outlines of the lecture with a sample outline provided to the volunteers.

3. Academic Skills.

A clipping file is maintained in the Intercultural Center which includes current human nature stories involving individuals from backgrounds similar to the ESL students, either in their native countries or in the United States. Students provide articles for the clipping file. The file is used by students, with the assistance of volunteers, to identify topics for writing and speaking assignments in their classes. When the student identifies a topic, volunteers frequently take the student to the Library to pursue the topic in-depth with the assistance of a reference librarian.

Students sometimes come to the Intercultural Center with requests for assistance in academic subject areas beyond the scope of the volunteer services available to them. They may request assistance with geometry or chemistry problems, for example. In these cases, the volunteer accompanies the student to the campus Tutoring Center and assists the student in making a connection with a student tutor for the specific class in which he/she is enrolled.

It is important to note that when referring our ESL students to other services on

campus, they are accompanied by a volunteer or a staff member who serves as the human link between the ESL student and the new contact person or service. In this way, the initial connection is assured.

4. English Language and American Culture Skills.

The majority of the requests for assistance from ESL students falls in the area of learning English and the American culture. Students have a high interest in learning idioms. In many cases, the idioms may block study for extended periods of time. One ESL student in the Nursing Program who was studying for an examination, spent hours in the library attempting to determine the meaning of "skid row bum," a phrase used to illustrate a concept in a textbook chapter she was studying. She could not distinguish between the main concepts and the illustrative material when the explanations included references (idioms) with which she was unfamiliar. Students are encouraged to make lists of unfamiliar language, including the context in which the language occurred. They bring their lists to a volunteer for discussion and clarification.

Students also bring practical cultural-specific questions, such as concerns about what to wear and how to act at parties and on dates. They are concerned about the protocol for using the telephone for personal, social, and business calls, including how to order materials by phone and how to say "no" to solicitors. Students make inquiries about the origin and custom of holiday celebrations in the United States. Many are concerned that their children behave appropriately in school when the focus is on an American holiday celebration.

5. Self-Esteem Skills.

Students invariably are eager to know details of the volunteers' lives. By eliciting stories from the volunteers, students learn practical details about the American culture from people they know and trust. Volunteers are usually very willing to talk about their values, professions, and families and, in exchange, invite the students to share stories about their backgrounds, families, and experience in coming to the United States. This exchange of stories gives both student and volunteer an opportunity to engage in informal conversation to compare cultures. More importantly, the volunteer has the opportunity to demonstrate

genuine interest in the student's life, thereby validating the student and helping to increase self-esteem and confidence in conversing with Anglos.

The value of storytelling in the academic setting is described by Peter J. Frederick in *The Power of the Story*:

> [The use of stories as a vehicle for education] is particularly important for women and racial and cultural minorities, who, as Parker Palmer points out, have had 'the particularities of their own stories silenced by both the so-called 'universal truths' developed by white male scholars and by the 'distancing' effects of academic rationality and objectivism. In classroom and faculty conversations alike, the academic emphasis on 'holding subjectivity at bay' keeps the rich diversity and enriching truths of women and minority stories from being part of our discourse. (Frederick)

The authentic relationships that develop between students and volunteers provide an open, trusting context for the mutual sharing of stories in ways that put subjectivity and caring into the learning process.

Another recent activity in the Intercultural Center that reinforces student self-esteem involves opportunities for students to take the role of paid consultants to publishers of college textbooks. During Fall, 1990, an inquiry came from a publisher of a major psychology textbook through a Professor of Psychology, requesting permission to hire ESL students to read the manuscript for the purpose of identifying unfamiliar words and phrases. Nine students were recruited who each read three chapters for a fee of $10.00 per chapter. Based on the student feedback, the Professor of Psychology revised the chapters to include more manageable language. This initial project was so successful that requests have been made by publishers for students to read manuscripts for another psychology text and a sociology text.

6. Referral Service.

Sometimes students come with concerns that cannot be managed by volunteers.

Questions arise that delve into the realm of personal family issues (i.e., divorce, health, child care), financial concerns (i.e., need for loans, investment); and legal issues (i.e., landlord/tenant disputes, traffic tickets and accidents). The Intercultural Center maintains relationships with social agencies within the community to which students can be referred, if services do not exist on the campus. The coordinator usually makes a direct contact to the agency by phone for the student.

In addition to these basic services, funded programs in vocation areas such as cosmetology and nursing have incorporated aspects of the community volunteer program into their design. (Ratliffe; Weaver, Bishop, Ratliffe)

Reasons for Success of the Community Volunteer Program

The following five characteristics of the Community Volunteer Program are primary reasons for its consistent and growing success:

1. The structure for the appointment time is informal. Either student or volunteer can shape the conversation after completing the initial exercise provided. In fact, some exercises are designed so that the flow and content of the conversation must be shaped by the participants.
2. The schedule of appointments is flexible. The schedule is built from the times the volunteers submit. In addition, volunteers may take time off and the service remains consistent because volunteers are double scheduled during peek hours and students may sign up for appointments no more than two weeks in advance.
3. When the student is enrolled in a Speech/ESL course, the appointment time is a structured requirement within the course outline and has an impact on the final course grade; hence, students value the appointment because the instructor and department place value on it.
4. The relationship between the volunteer and student provides social support, a necessary component for achieving success among high risk students. (Jones and Watson) In fact, the relationship provides one way of satisfying the need for support groups or person that was expressed by students completing the 1990 Intercultural Center Task Force Student Survey.

5. Perhaps the most significant factor contributing to the success of the program is the fact that volunteers and ESL students are able to establish authentic, mutually caring relationships. The Intercultural Center is a context in which self-esteem is nurtured for both students and volunteers.

The volunteers primarily have contact with two staff person in the Intercultural Center. Ruth Hunter, Coordinator, provides each volunteer with a one-hour orientation and then meets with volunteers at least one time during each semester. Lien Nguyen, who maintains the volunteer schedule and appointment book, is the daily contact person for both students as they request appointments and volunteers as they come to the Center to work with students. Lien maintains contact with volunteers by telephone when appointments are canceled by students or when volunteers cannot keep their schedules.

During the mid-semester meetings that Ruth Hunter has with volunteers, she learns of their attitudes toward the Center and suggestions for the volunteer program. Volunteers report advantages of the program for themselves, primarily including (1) how much they learn about other cultures and their own basic skills; (2) a sense of working directly to "create a better world;" and (3) personal feelings of pleasure, accomplishment, and increased self-esteem. They also report frustration in their lack of ability to fully understand student needs. Many volunteers report that students want them to come to their homes to conduct study sessions. The Center also receives requests by phone to have volunteers travel to homes where individuals are not able to leave. Decisions about home visits are left completely to the volunteers and students. When volunteers decide to participate in off campus activities, they are not acting as representatives of the campus or the Intercultural Center.

Through regular conferences with the bilingual student assistant staff and frequent drop-in visits from the ESL students, Ruth Hunter keeps abreast of how well the volunteer program meets student needs. Students consistently report that the open, supportive climate in the Intercultural Center results in their using the facility, the staff members, and especially the volunteers as an "extended home and family." Students feel welcome to offer

their free time between classes to assist the staff with clerical work, including running errands on campus, filing news articles, stuffing recruitment envelopes, and making student appointments. They use the lounge area for informal meetings with volunteers and for pleasure reading. One volunteer, who spends four hours each day to assist with clerical duties, provided board games in the lounge for the students' enrichment of sociological principles. Both the opportunities to contribute to the work of the Center and to use the it for social purposes contributes to the students' perception of the Center as an "extended home and family."

Conclusion

The services of the Community Volunteer Program have expanded primarily in response to the needs students have brought to the Intercultural Center, not through strategic program planning. The fact that those needs and the Center expansion has occurred in the areas of study skills, academic skills, English language and cultural skills, and self-esteem skills corroborates the findings of a 1988 project, Enrichment in Academic Success, conducted by the School of Nursing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in response to a need to facilitate success for students declared "at-risk." The study reports: "Successful retention of at-risk nursing students is best accomplished through an organized system that addresses their individual needs in the areas of academic, cognitive, and self-enhancement skills." The Alabama program resulted in a 95% retention rate. (Campbell and Davis)

Information about success of the Golden West College Community Volunteer Program for ethnic minority students exists primarily based on anecdotal accounts of students, volunteers, program coordinators, and instructors related to the program. Their narratives regarding the program seem consistent with the conclusion in the Executive Summary of the 1990 ASHE-ERIC High Education Report, *"High Risk" Students in Higher Education: Future Trends*. This summary concludes, " . . . academic support services must be offered that include developing and building skills [for achieving success among high-risk students]. Further, the provision of social support is vital. It can come from advisers/counselors, faculty, parents, family, and other students and peers. This framework brings together the student, the teacher, the

institution, parents, peers, and the community in a dynamic synthesis." (Jones and Watson, 1990). The Community Volunteer Program within the Intercultural Center at Golden West College provides the impetus for a dynamic synthesis.

As funding and energy becomes available, it will be important to conduct a formal study to determine (1) how many of the ESL students using the program are academically at-risk and (2) what the retention and success rate of these students is as compared with ESL students and Anglo students in programs and course work that do not incorporate the Community Volunteer Program as a support service. However, in the absence of a formal study, it is reasonable to conclude that the support services provided by the Community Volunteer Program are beneficial to students at-risk. Furthermore, the caring support system that these services constitute are likely to be beneficial to all students -- mainstream, non-tradition, and ESL as well as those at-risk.

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